
"HOW WE PERFORMED": EMBEDDED JOURNALISTS' ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS COVERING THE IRAQ WAR

By Shahira Fahmy and Thomas J. Johnson

A survey of embedded journalists suggests an overall positive perception of embedded reporting. While most embeds agreed their reports provided a narrow slice of the conflict, they still had a positive view of their work. Respondents also noted their stories differed from the stories of non-embedded journalists and perceived both types of reporting as invaluable. Further, embeds' attitudes towards the war, age, professional experience, and online reporting were correlated with perceived performance.



Just as the country was divided on whether to enter the Iraq War, media critics and political observers were divided on how well embedded journalists performed during the conflict. Supporters claim that because the press was given greater access than in any war since Vietnam, embedding allowed first-hand reports in real time about the war, giving a clearer sense of the nature of war than any previous conflict.¹ Supporters also noted embedded reporters could correct misstatements by military personnel because they witnessed events first-hand.²

Critics argued that embedding meant only a slice of the war could be reported while the broader picture of the war was lost,³ and that the military version of the war was the only one featured⁴ because journalists could not report objectively when they depended on the military for their needs and safety.⁵

While the performance of embeds has sparked considerable debate, less attention has been paid to how embeds rated their own performance. This study examines embedded journalists' perceptions of how well they covered the war and examines factors that may have influenced how they framed war coverage.

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The Media in the Two Gulf Wars

Coverage of the Persian Gulf War in 1991 was tightly controlled through censorship, pool reporting, and press conferences "bleached of meaningful content."⁶ The government set up eleven press pools to gather information. Pooled notes, photos, quotes, and stories sent back to headquarters in Saudi Arabia were distributed to other reporters. Military officers accompanied pool reporters and reviewed stories for sensitive information. Much of the press information on the war came from frequent military briefings.⁷

It is hardly surprising then that media critics and scholars had little good to say about media coverage. As the director of the Times-Mirror Center said, "The public thinks the media told enough of the truth, even though it basically acted as the military's microphone. Yet the press is uneasy with its own performance in the war because of the almost palpable feeling among them that they were used by the military."⁸

For the second Iraq War, the government created the embed system, with 600 journalists placed with front line and rear echelon units before and during the war. A Department of Defense directive promised that reporters embedded at ground and air bases would have access to service members and operational combat missions and that all interviews would be on the record. In return, journalists agreed not to release nineteen categories of information, including specific numbers of troops, aircrafts or units, information regarding future operations, and information about the wounded.⁹ The embedding was designed to improve press/military relations by allowing reporters to tell the soldiers' story. Also, the Pentagon needed credible reporters on the scene to counter enemy propaganda and claims about issues such as civilian casualties.¹⁰

Media Performance in the War

While critics viewed embedding as a flawed experiment serving military purposes more than balanced journalism,¹¹ many journalists hailed it as a success for the public's right to know. They believe that war coverage was considerably better than the indirect coverage of the first Gulf War.¹² Embedding "made possible a kind of intimate, immediate, absorbing, almost addictive coverage, the likes we have not seen before."¹³

Supporters argued that embedding succeeded for several reasons. First, the government largely lived up to its promise of allowing access, free of censorship.¹⁴ Second, embedding allowed reporters to provide first-hand reports in real time about the war, giving a clearer sense of the horrors and confusion of war than previously.¹⁵ Third, reporters on the scene could correct misstatements by military personnel and get stories out that might have been buried by military officials. For instance, while military officials reported that the war was going smoothly and soldiers were receiving little resistance, CNN brought pictures of attacks on Seventh Calvary units.¹⁶ Finally, while critics argued that embedded journalists got "too close" to their sources, supporters noted that military officials also got close to reporters and gave them insights they might not have given an average reporter.¹⁷

Still, the process raised concerns among many who believed embedding provided a skewed view of the war and favored the U.S. military perspective.

First, some observers contend that the rules for embedded reporting were not designed to provide maximum freedom to report the war, but to ensure that the military version of the war was the only one reported. Reporters were not allowed to travel independently, which meant they could rely on few sources other than the military. Interviews had to be on the record, which meant lower-level service people were less likely to criticize military procedures or operations. Officers were allowed to censor copy and restrict electronic transmissions for "operational security," which could be defined as whatever a field commander wanted to censor.¹⁸

Second, critics charged it would be difficult to remain objective when reporters depended on the military for food, shelter, transportation, protection, and information.¹⁹ Embedded journalist Gordon Dillow admitted:

I found myself falling in love with my subject. I fell in love with "my" marines. Maybe it's understandable. When you live with the same guys for weeks, sharing their dreams and miseries, learning about their wives and girlfriends, their hopes and dreams, admiring their physical courage and strength, you start to make friends—closer friends in some ways than you'll ever have outside of war. Isolated from everyone else, you start to see your small corner of the world the same way they do.²⁰

Third, by being wedded to one military unit, embedded journalists would have access only to the American perspective. Tethered to one unit, the embed could only present the war from that unit's perspective. Iraqi citizens and soldiers were inaccessible to reporters. Therefore, a broader picture about the success of the war and the reaction of the Iraqi people was lost.²¹ The media provided small slices of reality that did not always reflect the bigger picture.²² As a *U.S. News & World Report* journalist suggested, "Sitting on top of a Bradley fighting vehicle in southern Iraq might tell you a lot about one particular skirmish—but not necessarily anything about the overall state of the war."²³

Fourth, with few sources other than military sources, the media too often believed the Pentagon's spin on the news. For instance, most reporters readily accepted the government's claim that the Iraqi Republican guard was a formidable force "when in fact those units rolled up like a cheap carpet in the face of the U.S. advance." On the other hand, reporters often swung quickly to the other extreme. When Iraqi irregulars began harassing and slowing down the U.S. march toward Baghdad, some journalists began to describe the war in terms of a Vietnam-like quagmire.²⁴

Fifth, modern warfare involves shooting at a distant enemy, making it difficult to reconstruct what had happened in a battle and tell a

complete story.²⁵ Lacking transportation or translators, embeds were unable to verify military claims about the success of the war.²⁶ Similarly, because of the "long-distance" fighting, and concern about the impact back home, embedded reporters showed few American casualties and only occasional Iraqi victims. As *NewsHour* producer Terrence Smith said, "The concern for the sensibilities of the U.S. audience and the troops was understandable, but the net result was a 'clean' war, rather than the gory mess it was."²⁷

A survey of fifty-four embedded journalists reflected the ambivalence of journalists to the embedding process. While most thought the embedding experiment successful, they did admit that it raised ethical concerns.²⁸ Overall, 44.5% reported the experience was an "altogether positive experience" and an equal percentage said it had both positive and negative aspects. However, all fifty-four agreed that there should be "unilateral" journalists operating outside the military structure. Ninety-three percent said they could not imagine an alternative that would have given them as much first-hand access or be as comprehensive.²⁹ While critics worried that reporters would be unable to reign in their biases,³⁰ 80% argued that their objectivity was not undermined by living with the troops. However, when asked more specific questions about living and working with the military, respondents were much more divided: about 40% agreed and 46% disagreed that embedding results in journalists' losing their objectivity because they get too close to soldiers they cover, and 76% agreed that embedding provided a narrow snapshot of the war. They believed that their job was to report that narrow slice, leaving editors responsible for providing the big picture.³¹

Indeed, content analyses found considerable differences in how embedded and unilateral journalists covered the war. Embedded journalists described the war in terms of Iraqi weakness, the frequency of Iraqi desertion or surrender, and the joy of Iraqi citizens after the fall of the Hussein regime. Stories discussed friendly interactions between Allied soldiers and Iraqi civilians, but also characterized the tedium and fatigue of war. The war was generally described as an unparalleled success, with U.S. troops precisely targeting enemy targets. Unilateral journalists tended to be more negative, describing the possibility of important unconventional weapon counterattacks, the adequacy of Allied war planning, anger toward Americans for damage inflicted during the war, and mistrust of American intentions.³² Pfau et al. note, though, that while embed coverage was more positive, overall Iraq War coverage was not significantly more positive than coverage of the first Gulf War and the invasion of Afghanistan.³³

Cooper and Kuyper argue that the differences between embeds and unilaterals in their content analysis reflected the activities and conditions reporters observed directly. Embedded journalists traveling with combat troops observed the tedium and uncertainty of the situation, the dominance of the American troops, and civilian elation as the Hussein regime fell. Unilaterals witnessed the war from a distance and their stories concerned the uncertainty and unpredictability of the war as well as the potential for significant Iraqi military resistance and counterattack.³⁴

Framing is the process of selecting, emphasizing, interpreting, and excluding "some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communication text, in such a way, to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."³⁵ Framing involves both presenting the news (media frames) and comprehending it (audience frames). Carragee and Roeffs criticize framing researchers for focusing too much attention on how news stories incorporate frames and not enough on factors that influence how journalists construct frames, a process they refer to as frame sponsorship³⁶ and that Scheufele terms frame building.³⁷ Frame building research examines internal factors such as background and ideological orientations of journalists; their social norms and values; and journalistic routines that allow them to identify, classify, and package information for the reader.³⁸ It also explores external factors such as organizational pressures and constraints and pressures from sources, advertising, government officials, and other interest groups that influence how journalists construct the news.³⁹

In short, reporters do not make decisions in a vacuum. Rather, decisions are influenced by a whole host of internal and external factors. Little attention, however, has focused on what factors influence journalists' judgments of media performance. Rather, much of the literature has focused on external and internal factors that influence news judgments⁴⁰ and ethical decisions.⁴¹

Shoemaker and Reese have developed a five-level model for examining both macro- and micro-level forces influencing newsgathering and news content: the individual level, media routines level, organizational level, extra-media level, and ideological level. Their model is hierarchical, with each level having its own range of influences, but those are limited by higher level factors. For instance, journalists' conceptions of the roles of reporters (individual level) come from a process of newsroom socialization (media routines level) that has developed to meet organizational standards and goals (organizational level). Organizational standards and goals are shaped by pressures from advertisers, audiences, sources, and the economy (extra-media level), as well as ideological and cultural imperatives about the role of media in society (ideological level).⁴²

Numerous studies have explored elements of the model. For instance, at the individual level, scholars have explored factors that influence perceptions of journalistic roles.⁴³ Similarly, researchers have explored broad social and professional dimensions of ethical decision making among journalists.⁴⁴ Berkowitz and Limor found that factors at the individual level (basing decisions on personal professional values), occupational/professional level (views on proper professional conduct and code of ethics), and societal level (to what degree would the decision serve the public interest) had a more important role in shaping ethical decisions than factors at the organizational level (needs of the paper and reaction of the editor) and small group level (remembering what

colleagues had done in the past as well as consulting respected colleagues). Therefore, Berkowitz and Limor did not find the strict hierarchy that Shoemaker and Reese identify, with lower-level influences restrained by higher-level ones.

This research will explore the influence on perceptions of media performance of what Shoemaker and Reese call low-level individual influences (individual attitudes, personal attitudes toward war, and professional roles or norms), higher-level extra-media influences (military terminology and the Pentagon media boot camp), and ideological influences (the Iraqi culture and the Arabic language).⁴⁵ Few reporters understood the Iraqi culture or language, limiting them to seeking out English-language speakers, particularly the military.⁴⁶

Research Questions

This study will address the following questions:

RQ1: How did embedded reporters judge their performance during the Iraq War?

RQ2: Did embedded reporters feel that individual level factors, extra-media factors, and ideological factors influenced their reports on the Iraq War?

RQ3: To what degree did embedded reporters' perceptions of their performance in the war correlate with individual, extra-media, and ideological influences on war coverage?

RQ4: To what degree did embedded reporters' perceptions of their performance in the Iraq War correlate with demographic variables and measures of professional experience?

Method

The data come from a survey conducted 20 January 2004 through 10 March 2004 with embedded journalists of the Iraq War. A list of about 400 journalists was compiled, and personalized e-mails were sent directing respondents to a Web-based questionnaire.

Correspondents who only covered the Iraq War as unilateral journalists were removed from the list. Moreover, journalists who were approved to embed but who never covered the conflict, as well as news professionals who only managed the embedded program in their news organizations (for example, those in charge of making arrangements for journalists to be embedded with the military), were also eliminated from the list. Overall, it is estimated that 302 e-mails were delivered successfully to embedded reporters. To increase the response rate, four follow-up e-mails were sent.

A total of 159 respondents completed the survey by the first week of March. The response rate was 53%,⁴⁷ an extremely high rate given the busy schedules of journalists (many of whom were still in Iraq at the time)

and the diffusion of Internet viruses, spam, and junk e-mail leading potential respondents to screen and delete unfamiliar e-mail messages.

Using an online survey, the researchers had access to a limited number of e-mail addresses. Nevertheless, the approach offered potential efficiencies that include reducing costs, timeliness, and overcoming international boundaries.⁴⁸ Overall, cost effectiveness, accompanied by the fact that many of the journalists were still embedded during the military conflict, made the Web-based data collection a practical survey method for this study.

The Web-based questionnaire listed statements dealing with embeds' judgments of their performance during the Iraq War as well as questions on potential influences of individual level factors, extra-media factors, and ideological factors on embeds' reports from Iraq.⁴⁹

To assess embeds' judgment of their work, respondents evaluated statements on whether their stories differed from those by non-embedded reporters; whether their reports jeopardized troop safety; whether their stories provided a narrow slice of the conflict; and whether their stories were accurate, biased, fragmented, trustworthy, fair, thorough, and sensational. Respondents also evaluated whether embedded journalists were qualified for the job and to assess their overall performance in reporting the conflict. Response categories ranged from 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree").

Respondents assessed whether their personal attitude toward the war, their professional roles, and their individual values impacted their work. They also evaluated the influences of the Pentagon media boot camp and military terminology, the Arabic language, and the Iraqi culture on their work. Response categories ranged from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very much").

Additional data included age, gender, race, ethnic background, nationality, language proficiency, political affiliation, education, form of media reporting, years of professional and international experience, as well as experience with non-embedded reporting (if applicable).

A total of 159 embeds took part in the survey. Approximately 80% reported the conflict in more than one media format, with 70% indicating their reports included print and 30% reporting the war online. More than one-fourth covered the war visually through video (28.1%) and photography (26.8%), and more than 22% reported for radio.

Respondents were from 22 different countries, with 73% from the United States. More than 9 in 10 reported they were white and 95% indicated at least a university degree. Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 60 years old, with a mean of 41. Males greatly outnumbered females (85.5% to 14.5%).

Thirty-seven percent indicated they also had done reporting during the war as non-embedded journalists. Embeds tended to have extensive professional experience. About 30% reported working as journalists for more than two decades; 71% covered previous wars; and 70% indicated professional experience ranging from 11 to 20+ years of reporting.

Results

TABLE 1
*Responses to Statements Regarding Embedded Journalists' Perceptions
of Their Performance during the Iraq War (N=159)*

	Mean	Percent Reporting "Strongly Agree & Agree"	Percent Reporting "Strongly Disagree & Disagree"
The stories from embedded journalists provided a narrow slice of the conflict.	1.76	87.2%	6.8%
Embedded journalists were successful in reporting the conflict.	1.96	79.6%	3.4%
The stories from embedded journalists were accurate.	2.02	80.1%	2.1%
The stories from embedded journalists were trustworthy.	2.02	80.7%	5.5%
The stories from embedded journalists differed from stories from non-embedded journalists.	2.04	76.6%	8.3%
The embedded journalists were qualified for the job.	2.14	74.0%	5.5%
The stories from embedded journalists were fair.	2.17	72.9%	4.9%
The stories from embedded journalists were fragmented.	2.30	63.4%	13.1%
The stories from embedded journalists were thorough.	2.90	33.1%	22.7%
The stories from embedded journalists were sensationalized.	3.32	21.4%	46.2%
The stories from embedded journalists were biased.	3.51	17.5%	54.6%
The stories from embedded journalists jeopardized the safety of the troops.	4.40	1.4%	86.4%

(Note: 1=Strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=Neutral; 4=disagree; 5=Strongly disagree)

Nearly 7 in 10 indicated proficiency with at least one foreign language, with 38.1% reporting proficiency with at least two. Those proficient in a language, particularly that of the people they are covering, can access a wider variety of sources and rely less on English-speaking governmental sources. Some 60.5% lived outside their native country for at

TABLE 2

Responses to Statements Regarding the Perceived Influences of Individual Level Factors and Extra-Media Factors and Ideological Factors on Embedded Reports of the Iraq War (N=159)

	Mean	Percent Reporting Much & Very Much Influence	Percent Reporting No & Limited Influence
Professional Roles or Norms	3.94	72.8%	12.6%
Individual Values	3.32	46.6%	24.3%
The Iraqi Culture	2.65	27.4%	43.0%
Military Terminology	2.64	26.4%	48.6%
Personal Attitude toward the War	2.31	7.4%	54.7%
The Arabic Language	2.14	16.6%	64.6%
The Pentagon Media Boot Camp	1.62	2.8%	76.7%

(Note: 1=Not at all; 2=little; 3=Neutral; 4=Much; 5=Very much)

least a year, with 35% stating they lived abroad for a period ranging from 6 to more than 20 years.

Embedded Journalists & Perceived Performance. Table 1 details data for **RQ1** on how embedded journalists assessed their performance during the Iraq War. Nearly 9 in 10 of the respondents indicated that embedded reporting provided "a narrow slice of the conflict," and 76.6% agreed that stories from embedded journalists differed from stories by non-embedded journalists. Only one-third agreed that stories from embedded journalists were thorough and 63.4% agreed that the reports were "fragmented."

However, despite viewing embeds' stories as providing less than a full representation of the conflict, respondents still had a positive view of their work. Fewer than one-fourth agreed the reports were biased and sensationalized. Nearly 80% strongly agreed that, overall, the embedded journalists were successful in reporting the war.

Individual, Extra-media & Ideological Factors Influencing Embedded Reporting. **RQ2** asked about the perceived impact of individual level factors (individual values, attitude toward war, and professional values and norms), extra-media factors (military terminology and the Pentagon media boot camp), and ideological factors (the Iraqi culture and the Arabic language) on embedded reporting. Table 2 ranks and details the results.

Our analyses show that 72.8% perceived that professional roles or norms had the highest influence on their work. Other individual factors were perceived as having a much smaller impact. Only 46.6%, for example, indicated that individual values had an influence on their work.

Also, 54.7% indicated their personal attitude toward the war had little or no influence on reporting the conflict.

The results show that perceived effects of military terminology and the Pentagon media boot camp on embedded reporting were limited. Almost half of the respondents reported limited or no influence of military terminology on their work. The Pentagon media boot camp ranked last in impact. Ideological factors were also perceived as having little impact. Iraqi culture was perceived as influential by only 27.4% of the respondents. Further, 64.6% believed that not knowing how to speak Arabic had limited or no influence on reporting the Iraq War.

Factors Influencing Perceived Performance. To further explore questions about potential factors influencing embeds' perceptions of reporting, an index of perceived performance was computed from 11 measures of whether embedded reporting was: successful, accurate, biased, trustworthy, fair, thorough, sensational, fragmented, (a) narrow (slice of the conflict), and jeopardizing (troop safety); and whether embeds were qualified for the job ($\alpha = .83$).⁵⁰

RQ3 addressed the relationship between embeds' perceptions of their performance in reporting the Iraq War and individual, extra-media, and ideological influences. Data analysis yielded only one significant correlation. On the individual level factor, personal attitude toward the war ($.20, p < .05$) is positively correlated with statements on perceived performance. Respondents who reported their attitudes toward the war were not influential were more likely to have positive perceptions of embedded reporting than respondents who reported their attitudes did influence their reporting.

RQ4 examined the relationship between perceived perceptions of embedded reporting and demographic variables (age, education, gender, and race) and professional experience (years of professional experience, what medium the journalist works for, and whether the journalist also reported the war as a non-embedded/unilateral). Data analysis shows respondents' age ($-.23, p < .01$) and years of professional experience ($-.21, p < .05$) correlate negatively with statements on perceived performance. Younger and less experienced respondents are more likely to have negative perceptions of embedded reporting than older respondents with more years of professional experience. When reporting for any particular medium was recoded as a dichotomous (yes or no) variable, only online reporting is positively correlated with statements on perceived performance ($.19, p < .05$). Those who reported online had more positive perceptions of embedded reporting than respondents who reported the war through a different medium.

Discussion

Our results suggest an overall positive perception of embedded reporting among those doing the reporting. Only a limited number of respondents viewed embedded reporting as biased and sensational. The majority claimed their reporting was accurate, trustworthy, and fair, and did not jeopardize the safety of the troops. And although the majority indicated their stories provided a "narrow slice" of the conflict, they believe embedding provided great access to the battlefield and under-

standing to what was happening on the ground. One respondent explained:

What embedding has done is to make it possible for media organizations to better understand what is really happening in the “fog of war,” rather than making guesses and assumptions based on reporters who didn’t witness what happened, but merely arrived two or three days later ... The embed experience opened my eyes about how often and easy it has been in the past for reputable news organizations to get it wrong.

While respondents concede that embedding provided a tunnel-vision perspective, they strongly believe their reports were as complete as possible and that they were successful in reporting the war. Moreover, they were frequently given specific information about the broader military objectives of a specific operation, allowing a better understanding. One respondent reported a personal experience:

It was humorous, no hilarious, to see some video taped images from CNN and Fox TV in the final days before the war (still at Kuwaiti base camp) where so-called “experts” were speculating on the battle plan—since we all already knew the battle plan in advance but were sworn to keep out of our copy. The joke became “an expert is anybody who is more than 50 miles away from what is really happening.”

About two-thirds of our respondents agreed that embeds’ stories were fragmented. Many reported they often had a limited perspective, as they were not able to compare or check facts because they did not have the Internet or television. Moreover, some thought non-embedded reporters had a broader perspective on the war. One respondent wrote: “Embedded journalists had limited perspective on what was happening outside the unit they were embedded with. Their stories were therefore fragments, whereas some journalists operating independently could get a fuller picture.”

Embeds, however, did not perceive the difference in perspective as having jeopardized the quality of reporting. Approximately three-fourths reported their stories were accurate, trustworthy, and fair. They believe their reports were, for the most part, as complete as possible about the units they were assigned to cover, but also inherently different from the non-embedded reports. One wrote: “As an embedded reporter, you report about the army from the inside. You get a much closer look on the war-machinery than a non-embedded journalist would get. So the perspective differs, but that does not make embedded journalism inaccurate or biased.”

These differences between embedded and unilateral experiences also led to differences in the emphasis and focus of reports. Respondents

indicated that while their stories focused on the troops and the limited contacts troops had with Iraqi populace, reports filed by unilateral journalists focused more on other issues, such as refugees, Iraqi civilians being wounded and killed, and Iraqi reception and perception of the U.S. military.

Finally, embeds reported that because their stories focused on the military, their news organizations weren't depending on them for the *whole* Iraqi story. One wrote, "My editors were merely looking for me to chronicle a small slice of the war that the American combatants were fighting." Embed reporting was to provide a "grunt's-eye view" and not an overall perspective. Because embedded reporters believed their primary goal was not to provide a full representation of the conflict, they believed they were successful and had a positive perception of their performance.

Furthermore, respondents emphasized the need of editors and news organizations to combine reports from embedded and non-embedded reporters operating outside the military structure, as others have suggested.⁵¹ One embed explained:

Embedded journalists were at the scene of battles or other incidents first. They could report on what they saw happening... The unilateral journalists were not always on the scene as things happened, but they could arrive after the fact and spend as much time as needed to piece together what had happened from witnesses, etc. Both embedded and unilateral journalists, when their different points of view are combined, provide value in helping the world get a slightly more complete view of a war than has been possible in recent conflicts, when too many journalists have been content to sit in briefings and let military officials make claims about what happened.

Our results suggest that reporters believe individual level factors such as individual values and professional values or norms had a more important role on embedded reports than extra-media factors, such as military terminology and the Pentagon media boot camp, and factors such as the local language and the Iraqi culture. These results fail to support the "direction" of influence suggested by the Shoemaker and Reese model,⁵² as well as frame building studies suggesting that extramedia factors exert a bigger influence on journalistic values than individual ones.⁵³ Several factors could account for the differences.

First, past studies have focused primarily on how internal and external factors affect newsgathering, rather than on journalists' perceptions of media performance. While newsgathering practices are highly susceptible to outside influence such as source availability and pressure to appease advertisers, reporters' judgments of media performance may more likely be based on internal values such as how well coverage matched up to journalistic norms and values. This would be consistent with Berkowitz and Limor's suggestion that internal factors such as personal professional values, views on proper professional conduct and ethics, and perceptions of how a decision would serve the public interest

guided ethical decisions more than external factors such as needs of the paper, reactions of the editor, and what colleagues have done in the past.⁵⁴

A second explanation may lie in how the variables were operationalized. "Extramedia influences" were gauged by examining the perceived effect of military technology and the media boot camp on media performance. The limited perceived impact of these could reflect the extensive professional experience reported by the majority of the respondents, combined with the fact that many also did *not attend* the Pentagon media boot camp. The limited impact of "ideological factors," such as knowledge of the culture and language, may reflect the embeds' limited contact with Iraqi civilians. Perhaps if we had relied on different measures of external forces—such as availability of sources—and ideology—such as the influence of American values—their perceived influence would have been stronger.

Finally, our study measured factors that influenced *perceptions* of performance and not *actual* media performance. While supporters noted that embed rules allowed reporters more freedom than earlier conflicts, critics noted that the rules for embeds were designed to ensure that only the official perspective was reported.⁵⁵ Perhaps the fact that journalists perceived that they were being guided by their own values more than being manipulated by government policies suggests that the embed program worked to the military's interests.

Examining the relationship between embeds' perceptions of performance and individual, extra-media, and ideological influences suggests that attitudes toward the war had an impact on embeds' perceptions. The more objective embedded reporters strived to be in their work, the more they perceived their work and the work of others to be successful. Our analysis suggests that respondents who reported their attitudes toward the war had little influence in their reports were more likely to have positive perceptions of embedded reporting than others who reported their attitudes were influential.

Our data also found age, years of professional experience, and online reporting affected perceived performance. Older and more experienced respondents are more likely to have positive perceptions of embedded reporting than younger respondents with fewer years of professional experience. These more experienced reporters were aware how much more freedom journalists enjoyed in this war. Embeds who reported the war online were more likely to have positive perceptions of embedded reporting than respondents who reported through a different medium. One explanation could be that online reporters had more access to sources of information and thus were able to report events in context, leading to an overall positive perception.

Finally, the majority of embeds believe embedded reporters were qualified for the job. In fact, embeds reported extensive professional and international experience and the majority covered previous wars. One respondent commented: "Of more than the 100 embedded journalists that I met and interacted with, most were among the best in their news organizations... the overwhelming majority of embedded journalists

were *top notch*." This may help explain positive perceptions of performance.

Results of our study are consistent with previous suggestions that while reporters believed the embedded experiment proved successful, the process did raise some concerns.⁵⁶ Embeds noted successful reporting depended on editors back home to provide comprehensive coverage. Both embedded and non-embedded reporters covered important, yet different, slices of the conflict, as shown by content analyses.⁵⁷ Because the two groups covered the war differently, the views of unilaterals and embeds need to be compared and contrasted to get a clearer sense of how journalists perceived the media performed in the conflict. Future research should continue to examine whether embedded journalists hold positive views of how they performed in the Iraq War.

NOTES

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45. E-mail conversation with Pamela Shoemaker, 11 March 2004, and Stephen Reese, 12 March 2004.

46. Burnett, "Embedded/Unembedded II."

47. The actual rate may be higher. Only those who replied to our e-mail explaining they were not embedded were removed from the list. It is possible similar non-embeds may have chosen to ignore our e-mails.

48. See Don A. Dillman, *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2000).

49. Some of the statements and questions of our online questionnaire were adapted from a Web-based survey administered by the Missouri School of Journalism. The survey examined editors' attitudes toward embedded journalism.

50. For the purpose of creating the index, negative statements were recoded to positive ones. The variables were then summed to create the index.

51. Ganey, "Mixed Reviews."

52. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*

53. Carragee and Roefs, "The Neglect of Power."

54. Berkowitz and Limor, "Professional Confidence and Situational Ethics."

55. Jensen, "The Military's Media."

56. Ganey, "Mixed Reviews."

57. Pfau et al., "Embedding Journalists in Military Combat Units"; Cooper and Kuypers, "Embedded versus Behind-the-Lines Reporting."